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BBG Audience Research and Research Methodology

Measures of Impact: The BBG uses an Impact Model to measure the impact of its networks. The model is based on the practice of objective journalism and tracks the BBG mission to inform, engage, and connect audiences in support of freedom and democracy. The model outlines the impact in three sectors: audiences, media and governments and includes quantitative and qualitative indicators that represent impact over the short, medium and long term.

Indicators include weekly audience, trustworthiness, audience sharing of content, content co-creation with affiliates, increased understanding of current events, and high-profile news pickups among others. The model is flexible, given the range of media environments in which the BBG networks operate and accounts for a range of platforms – from shortwave to digital.

Weekly Audience: The Impact Model outlines a host of factors that determine success in target markets; one of the key indicators is *measured weekly audience*. The measured weekly audience captures the number of people consuming BBG products – radio listeners, TV viewers, and online users – and is the number of adults (15+) who “listened, watched or saw online materials last week.” It is the standard measure of audience reach for the BBG and other international broadcasters, such as Deutsche Welle. This number is determined by scientific survey using probability sampling to identify and project audience members in a given population.

Wherever possible, BBG-commissioned surveys are national in scope, including rural and economically marginal populations that are typically excluded from commercial media studies but whose behavior is critical for understanding BBG’s audience and tracking performance.

Although the BBG has conducted surveys in more than 100 countries and territories, and is finding ways within tight budget environments to add key performance indicators to others’ surveys, it cannot survey everywhere that an audience *might possibly* exist, and the estimate may therefore reflect an undercount.

Measured audience size and its expression as a percentage of the adults within a population, is not the same as “popularity” or “preferred source of news” - indicators sometimes cited by other polls. Weekly audience is not the same as “footprint” or the number of people who have access to broadcasts. Measured audience size is in keeping with the standards of the Conference of International Broadcasting Audience Researchers, and is a key indicator of success for international broadcasters in a local market.

Quality Research: The BBG’s audience and market research is done in accordance with the highest professional standards via local market research firms around the world through a contract with the Gallup Organization. We also rely on industry experts such as AC Nielsen, Comscore and others for market data.

To achieve maximum objectivity, measurements are performed independently. Outside research providers under contract to the BBG, currently Gallup and previously InterMedia, carry out the representative audience research on VOA, OCB, RFE/RL, RFA, and MBN. Entity-wide performance values are computed by the IBB Office of Research and Assessment and verified by each entity's research director.

Investment in Research: Reliable and high quality research allows us to assess our effectiveness, and to tailor programming and delivery methods. Research spending added up to close to \$6.0 million in FY 2015.

Hard to Reach Locales: BBG is able to do legitimate survey research, at our standards of performance, in the overwhelming majority (95%) of BBG target countries and regions. Only in 5% of the cases are we not able to do the work (China-XUAR, North Korea, Tibet, Cuba, Oman, Syria, Turkmenistan. In FY16, the BBG is planning survey research in Cuba.) In countries where information is tightly controlled and tuning in to foreign broadcasts is sometimes illegal or where populations are hard to access, audiences can be difficult to measure. Numbers for these hard-to-reach countries and regions (where we can only conduct non-representative surveys) are not included in our overall estimate.

Quantitative audience measurements are conducted through national and sub-national or urban surveys, using face-to-face interviews when possible and phone interviews in a few restricted environments.

Random probability sampling is used where possible, and sample sizes range from 1,000-5,000 respondents. Probability sampling means that survey participants are chosen such that each unit of the population has a known probability of being surveyed. The use of random probability sampling allows a researcher to make extrapolations to the wider population.

Non-representative surveys are surveys that do not employ random probability sampling, and thus cannot be extrapolated to the population. These would include surveys of diaspora or refugee populations.

The Broadcasting Board of Governors is an independent federal agency, supervising all U.S. government-supported, civilian international broadcasting, whose mission is inform, engage, and connect people around the world in support of freedom and democracy. BBG networks have an audience of 226 million people in more than 100 countries. BBG networks include the Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, the Middle East Broadcasting Networks (Alhurra TV and Radio Sawa), Radio Free Asia, and the Office of Cuba Broadcasting (Radio and TV Martí).